How to set up and run an autistic adult peer-to-peer support group

National Autistic Society Cymru

The Welsh Peer Support Group Project

National Autistic Society Cymru

Welcome to our peer-to-peer support project in Wales. This project is funded by the Welsh government and aims to support autistic adults to form and run their own social groups.

We know autistic individuals will often experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. By setting up or just attending a peer social group, you will be in a safe environment where you can be yourself and meet others with similar interest and life experience.

This e-book explains how to go about starting your own peer-to-peer support group. It includes practical information and links to instructional videos.

For further resources and information please visit our website:

* If larger print is required on any of the following resources, there are easy read versions available here in our online Toolkit.

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Introduction

Social groups provide a safe place where you can socialise comfortably with a peer group that understands. It can be enormously therapeutic for autistic adults to meet other people experiencing the same challenges.

The aims and objectives of social groups for members include:

- to provide safe social environments
- to facilitate social opportunities and activities
- to foster the development of social confidence
- to widen members' range of social experiences.

Leading or attending a peer social group for autistic adults will send you on an exciting journey of self-discovery, but what does a successful peer group look like?

Meet our very first **autistic adult peer social group** from Conwy:

Where to start

If you are considering setting up a social group, you will need lots of initial consultation to find out what the group wants. You will need to be properly guided by them and not by assumptions about what you think they would like to do. This group may already exist, or you may have to advertise for members.

Start small. You don't need lots of people to start a social group; it could begin with just three or four members. However, whether you have four or 40 people attending, make sure you get all their contact information so you can keep them informed about planned activities.

Things to consider

Location	Activity	How members can take part	Things to consider
Online or in-person	Book club	People read or listen to the same book and discuss it. Or people take turns to talk about and recommend their favourite books.	Establish clear ground rules, eg, turn-taking/the length of time each member is allowed to speak.
Online or in-person	Choir	Rehearsals and musical quizzes online.	This has considerations for those with auditory sensitivities.
In-person	Cinema group	Watch an autism-friendly screening of a film.	Budget, need to have access to a local venue.

Location	Activity	How members can take part	Things to consider
In-person	Climbing club	Attending a climbing wall together.	Need to have access to a local venue. Members may have differing physical/ co-ordination abilities.
Online or in-person	Dance classes	Shared screening of free online dance classes, such as 305.	Members may have differing physical/co-ordination abilities.
Online or in-person	Gaming groups	Online multiple player games or in-person board games.	Establish clear ground rules, eg, turn-taking, code of conduct.
Online	Gogglebox group	The group watch a TV show together and discuss their thoughts on the show. One week could be watching an art class, the next a cooking show, the next a history documentary…	Establish clear ground rules, eg, taking turns to choose a show.
Online or in-person	Late diagnosis support groups	A space for recently diagnosed autistic people to have a chat and a cuppa. Members can share their tips on overcoming barriers, eg, how to answer a phone or use public transport.	This group is not a post-diagnostic service, and this needs to be made clear for people wishing to join the group.

Location	Activity	How members can take part	Things to consider
Online or in-person	LGBTQ+ group	An accepting space for LGBTQ+ members to share news, listen to speakers, and take part in events and challenges.	Access to a quiet space. Establish clear ground rules, eg, treat all members with respect.
Online or in-person	Lego club	Attendees can share their own Lego models with the group, or all work on similar models.	Budget.
Online or in-person	Life skills group	Attendees can share skills they'd like to learn, and learn them with group members that can already do these skills. For example, cooking, gardening, socialising, preparing for job interviews, writing, or photography.	Suitable equipment/facilities may be needed to learn the skills, eg, to follow online baking tutorials.
Online or in-person	Music group	This could be attending or watching a gig online, or learning a musical skill.	Budget, auditory sensitives, different musical abilities and experiences.
Online	Quiz group	Everyone brings five questions, so the quiz master role is shared and members' attention is maintained.	Multiple choice questions work well. Ask members to create questions based on their special interests.

Location	Activity	How members can take part	Things to consider
Online or in-person	Repair café workshop group	Attendees take turns to pick an item of interest and explain why it broke/how to fix it.	Make sure no one chooses to physically dismantle anything particularly essential or any dangerous items.
In-person	Ten-pin bowling club	Playing games and socialising.	Need to have access to a local venue. Differing physical/co-ordination abilities.
Online	Virtual tour group	Visit museums, cities, the pyramids, etc together online.	Members need to respect each other's choices.
In-person	Walking groups	Members take part in local walking routes.	Differing physical and sensory sensitivities.
Online or in-person	Warhammer club	To paint figures together or play a game in a venue.	Budget.
Online or in-person	Women's group	A group for autistic women to share their challenges and strengths.	Access to quiet space. Establish clear ground rules, eg, respect.

Choosing an activity for an in-person group

Ideas based on a physical activity

Gardening group

Climbing group

Ten-pin bowling group

Dancing group

Walking group

Repair café workshop group

Choosing an activity for an in-person group

Special interests or identity-based

Warhammer group

Lego group

Music/choir group

Book club

Late diagnosis support group

Women's group

Choosing an activity for an online group

Special interests or identity-based group ideas

Virtual tour group

Gogglebox group

Photography group

LGBTQ+ group

Quiz group

Gaming group
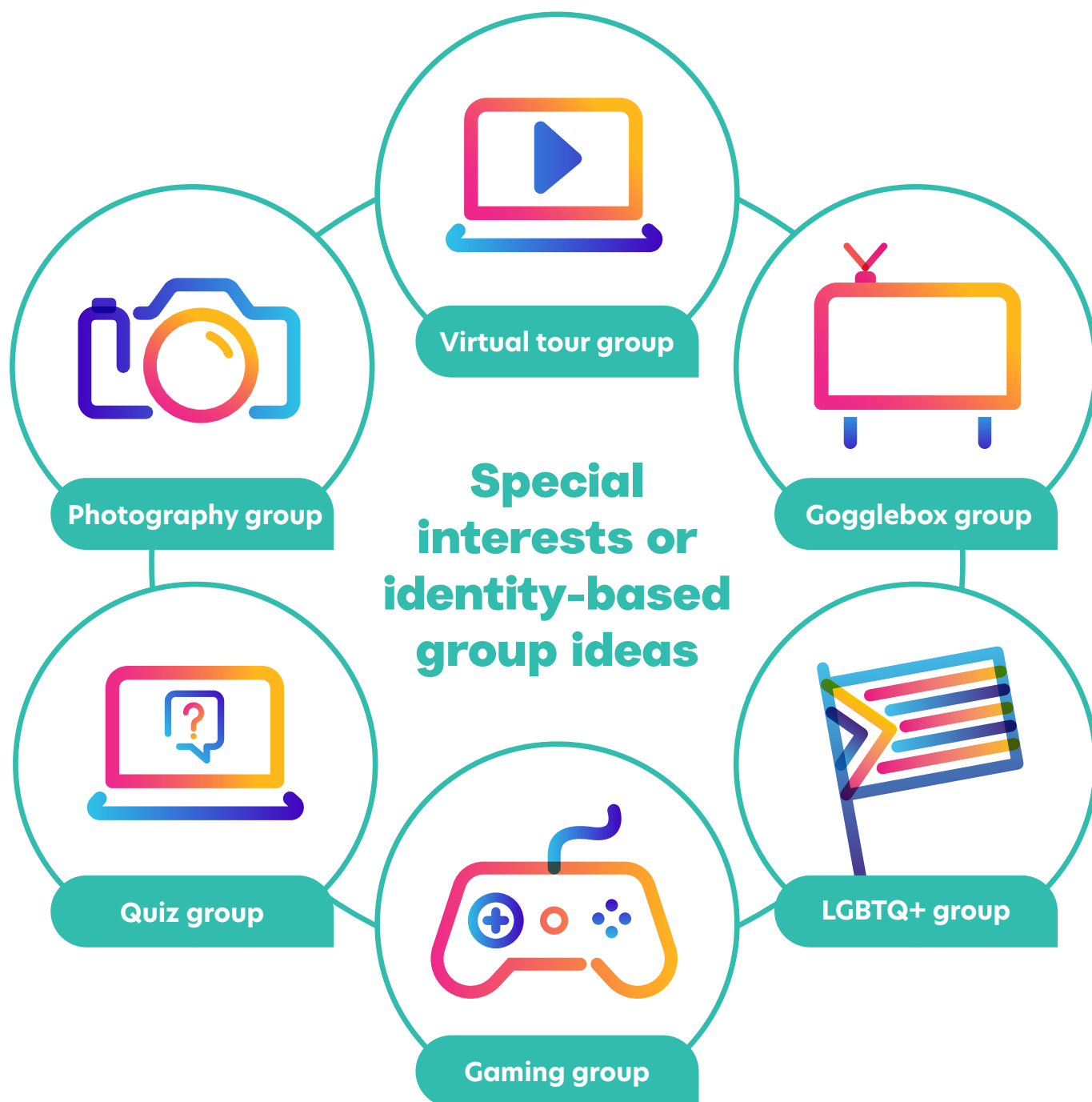
Planning

Many social groups like a mix of social activities and discussion. The activities and events you decide to run will depend on the group of people attending. Things you should consider when planning activities are:

- **the age range of the group.** In general, group members may prefer activities associated with people of their age. For example, younger people may enjoy youth club activities such as pool, music, computer games etc, whereas older people may be more interested in outings such as bowling, the cinema or going to the pub.
- **sensory issues.** These are very common for autistic people, so try to avoid places or activities with loud noises, smoke, intense odours, crowds, severe lighting etc.
- **the needs of the group.** You may have people interested in joining the group who have diagnoses from across the spectrum and, as a result, may have different needs. There may be other members who have mobility needs. These differing needs should be taken into consideration in your planning, and everyone should be treated as a valuable individual.
- **the interests of the group.** Some members may have intense interests; see if you can involve these in your planning.
- **cost.** Try to keep the activities free or as cheap as possible so this doesn't put people off attending. You might need to do some fundraising or apply for grants in order to subsidise activities.
- **the number of volunteers required.** Consider how many volunteers you will need to run the group. This will vary depending on the size of the group and the nature of the activity.
- **health and safety.** Make sure all your activities and events are risk assessed.

The activities and events you decide to run can just be things you usually enjoy with friends and family, such as going to the pub, cooking, gardening, shopping, playing video games or meeting for a coffee. You might want to do the same activity each time or vary it. You might even incorporate some fundraising into these activities.

It is also good to include some formal social skills learning, if possible. An ideal way of delivering this is to bring in speakers who are similar to your group members; for example, who are of a similar age or have similar interests.

Don't worry if the group members aren't initially as enthusiastic as you about the group. Taking part in social activities can be difficult for some people, so they might just be apprehensive. Friendships might not develop immediately either, but persevere, as friendships may form as the group develops.

Always try and provide name tags for people at activities, as they can help members to remember each other's names and begin conversations. You could create a photo board if that is something your members are comfortable with. Taking group photos at activities also helps members to feel like they are part of a group.

Don't expect everyone to come to every meeting or activity; sometimes people are just busy. To help you plan, ask for an RSVP for activities, so you can have a rough idea of numbers.

Finally, try and keep computer files or a scrapbook of the events and activities you planned, so you can reuse resources later and remember what you have done, what worked well, and what you might not try again. Gain regular feedback from your members by issuing feedback forms or similar, so the ideas for activities come from your members and not just the volunteers.

For the instructional video *"How to choose an activity"*, please click or scan here:

For the instructional video *"How to run a peer support conversation group"*, please click or scan here:

Things to consider when starting a peer support group

1. What are the people in your group like?

Consider:

- What are their likes or dislikes?
- Does everyone in the group have the same budget to spend on activities?
- Does anyone have any physical or medical disabilities that need to be considered?
- When attending a venue, is it easy for the whole group to get to? For example, are there good transport links?

2. What is the main focus of the group going to be?

The focus of the activity will depend on the group's aims and how often they want to meet. Do they want:

- a regular activity, eg a meeting in the same coffee shop on the first Tuesday of every month?
- a rota of different activities, eg ten-pin bowling one week and a climbing wall the next?

3. Is everyone in the group happy with the choice of activity?

Before booking, it is important that everyone in the group feels listened to and that their thoughts and feelings have been taken into consideration. As a group, agree on:

- making compromises on the choice of activity
- taking it in turns to choose and select activities
- voting on activities and going with what the majority of the group wants.

How to run a peer support talking group

An autistic adult peer support group can help people communicate in a supportive and confidential environment. Members of the group can express emotions, question thoughts and beliefs, and focus on helpful actions that others in the group may suggest.

1. At the beginning of the group session

The group facilitator will open the group by:
- introducing themselves
- communicating the aims and objectives of the group
- establishing the rules for behaviour with the group and creating a code of conduct
- acknowledging the importance of different modes of communication.

2. The role of the group facilitator

Start the session with a wellbeing check with each member in turn. Remind the members that everyone will have the opportunity to contribute, but nobody will be forced to do so. Make sure:
- quieter members of the group are not left out
- provide verbal prompts, eg "What have you been watching on TV?"
- intervene if one person is talking for too long.

3. Introduce the agreed topic for discussion

The facilitator should introduce the agreed topic and then follow the flow of the conversation. Some groups will flow naturally without support.

Some groups may benefit from:

- visual posters
- turn-taking
- YouTube clips
- refocusing the topic under discussion.

4. At the end of the group session

The group facilitator should close the group by:

- thanking everyone for attending
- establishing the theme of the next group discussion
- confirming the time and date of the next meeting.

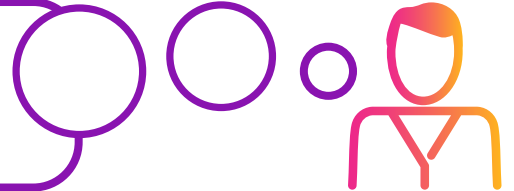# Accepting different styles of communication in a peer support group

Peer support group facilitator:

Welcome everyone, my name is Jazz.

Group member:

I don't like giving eye contact. I prefer to look away or doodle when I talk.

Peer support group facilitator:

This group is your group and it is a safe, supportive and confidential space for you to express emotions, question thoughts and beliefs, and focus on helpful actions that others in the group may suggest.

Group member:

I prefer to just listen until I feel more confident to speak. I may text or write down my thoughts.

Peer support group facilitator:

Let's start by taking it in turns to check in on how you are doing this week?

Group member:

Hi Jazz, I have had a great week, thanks.

Peer support group facilitator:

It would be great to hear from you all, but you do not have to contribute if you do not want to, and you may do so using your preferred method of communication.

Group member:

I prefer you to ask open-ended questions or provide options or choices.

Facilitation

The facilitator should:

- be an appointed volunteer
- have agreed contact details for all members
- identify other volunteers to assist in facilitating the meetings, agreeing on their levels of commitment, the size of the group, the location and regularity of meetings, activities, any risks in relation to individuals, and mechanisms for feedback and planning
- communicate the aims and objectives of the group to potential group members
- identify, with the help of other volunteers, suitable, safe, and accessible venues and liaise with venues
- share any details of the venue type, location and ambience/atmosphere with members; for example, noise level, public access, and the level of commotion/activity
- share any details of transport links to the venue and any transport arrangements, eg independent or supported travel.

Instructional videos

For the instructional video *"How to book a venue"*, please click or scan **here**:

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For the instructional video *"How to inform group users of an event"*, please click or scan **here**:

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For the instructional video *"What to do at the arrival of your activity"*, please click or scan **here**:

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For the instructional video *"How to run an online autistic adult group"*, please click or scan **here**:

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How to book a venue for your group activity

1. Choosing a venue

Check that the venue is suitable for all of your members' specific needs. For example:

- Do you need wheelchair access?
- Are there disabled parking spaces?
- Can members get to the venue on public transport?
- Do members have any sensory issues to be considered, such as bright lights, loud noises or smells?
- Is a quiet space available for members who feel stressed or tense?

2. When to hold the event?

Find out:
- how many people are coming
- what is a good time to suit all the members?
- what day should it be held on?
- should it be held on a weekday or weekend?
- should it be held during the day or in the evening?

Make a note of the:
- **date of the event**
- **start and finish times of the event**
- **number of people attending the event**

3. Ready to book the venue

When you have the information you need to book the venue, there are four ways to do this.

- In person: speak to a staff member at the venue.

- By phone: look up the venue contact phone number and speak to a staff member.

- By email: email your booking requirements directly to the venue. Find the venue's email address on their website.

- Complete the online booking form on the venue's website.

NB: You may be asked to leave contact details (your name, telephone number or email address). You may also be asked to pay in advance of the booking. Be prepared for this possibility. Once you have completed these steps, your booking is complete.

Different ways to book a venue

1. Online booking

Some venues have a website with an online booking service, eg ten-pin bowling.

Scroll through the website to find the activity and deal you are looking for.

You will need to enter the:

1. location
2. date
3. time
4. number of games
5. number of adults playing.

Then click the **'Get Prices & Availability'** button.

1. Online booking continued...

If the deal includes food, you will need to make a note of the food choices of the people attending. Take this list with you to the event in case people forget what they have ordered.

Name	Cheese Burger	Chicken Burger	Spicy Bean Burger	The Big Dog
Jack Blogs			X	

When everyone's options have been entered, press **'Confirm'** and continue to **'Make Payment'**.

2. Email the venue

Suggested email template to book a venue

Dear Bob,

I am the group leader of the Wrexham Autistic Adult Social Group. I would like to book a table at the Yummy Food restaurant:

• on Saturday 30 January 2022

• from 6pm

• for 12 people.

We would like a quiet table, away from the kitchen door.

Please confirm the booking. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best wishes,

Megan Jones

3. Phone the venue

Suggested voice script to book a restaurant table

You: Hello, is that the Yummy Food restaurant?

Them: Yes

You: My name is Megan Jones, and I am the group leader of the Wrexham Autistic Adult Social Group. I would like to book a quiet table that is not near the kitchen door on:

• **Saturday 11 December**

• from **6pm**

• for **12** people.

Them: Yes, that will be fine. Can I have a contact number please?

You: 089764532

Them: Ok, that is all booked for you.

You: Thank you, see you on Saturday at 6pm. Bye.

Booking a venue script

Staff member:

Good afternoon, this is venue X, how may I help you?

Peer support group facilitator:

Hello, I'm interested in booking a room for ten autistic adults.

Staff member:

We have a function room available, would that be suitable?

Peer support group facilitator:

Yes maybe. How much does the room cost?

Also, would it be available on Friday 1 April 2022 from 12pm until 4pm, please?

Staff member:

The room is available on that day and time, and the cost is £50. This will include free tea and coffee making facilities. Is this ok?

Peer support group facilitator:

Can I check whether the room has wheelchair access and is there a quiet space available near the room?

Staff member:

The room is on the ground floor and there is a screened area available at the back of the room.

Peer support group facilitator:
Thank you, I accept. Please email me the booking information and the receipt (group facilitator gives name and e-mail address).

Staff member:
The receipt is on its way, we look forward to welcoming your group.

Peer support group facilitator:
Thank you, see you on Friday 1 April at 12pm.

How to let group users know about an event

1. Methods of communication

Before an event, it is important to communicate clearly in writing with the group. You can do this via:

- a text message
- social media
- email.

2. Things to include in communication

Clearly specify:

- the **date**, the **time** and the **location** of the event
- **how long** the activity will last, eg, say between 2pm-3.30pm, rather than one and a half hours.

Also provide:

- **clear expectations** of what to expect, eg use **visual aids** to show transport links and photos of the venue
- **contact details** in case of cancellation or delay
- **plenty of notice**, eg about two weeks before the event.

3. Other ways to communicate

To encourage people to come along to events regularly:

- just before the activity (eg, ideally three days before the event), send out a reminder to group users
- the day after the event, send out follow-up communication to all **new** attendees. This will encourage them to attend again and provide an opportunity to share their experiences with the group leader.

What to do when you arrive at your group activity

1. When you arrive at your activity

- Arrive at the venue 15 minutes early.
- Be prepared to make a payment for the activity using cash or card.
- Greet and welcome group members individually on arrival.

2. Venue specifics

- Let members know where the toilets are.
- Let members know where the quiet space is, if there is one.

3. Before starting your activity

- Introduce yourself as the group facilitator and explain what your role is.
- Give out name badges to all the group members.
- Encourage members to talk with each other by suggesting an exercise where they can get to know one another. For example, members could tell the group one thing that they like, and one thing that they are good at.
- Start the activity.

Visual aids for travelling to a venue

An autistic person may feel anxious before going to a new venue for the first time. Knowing what to expect can help reduce this anxiety. Visual aids can help to clarify the expectations of what the venue looks like and how to get there.

Example one: car route to a meeting in Rock Church Hall
(you may also want to suggest using a map or a Sat Nav)

Approaching Yelverton from Plymouth, either:

1. Take the next right turn to the Yelverton shops.

Park at the Yelverton shops, then walk across the road to the church hall.

Or:

2. Continue to the roundabout and take the second exit to the church hall.

Park in front of the church hall on Harrowbeer Road.

Do not park in front of the ramp entrance.
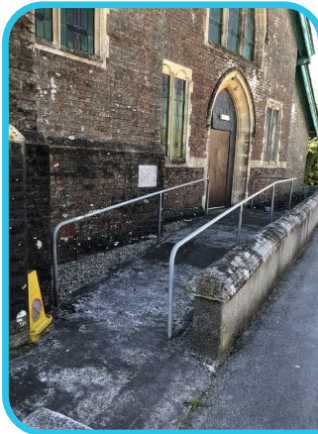
At the church hall

Walk up the slope. There is an external entrance and an internal door (this may be tight for wheelchair users). This leads into the main hall, where the meeting is held. We are the only users.

Example two: bus/walking route to Rock Church Hall
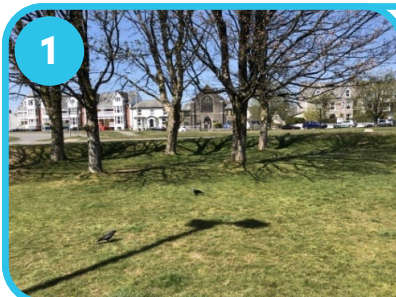
1	Get off the bus at the Yelverton shops. You can see the church hall opposite.
2	This is the view from the bus stop towards the Yelverton shops.
3	Beside the bus shelter are the steps you need to go up to get to the church.

4 From the top of the steps, take the path to the right.

5 Cross over the road. There is an island in the middle.

6 Follow the path to the church hall.

7 The entrance to the meeting room is at the side of the church.

8 Go up the ramp to the church hall entrance.

How to run an online activity group

1. Why run an online activity group?

- To alleviate social isolation if meeting in person is difficult or members live far apart.
- To bring members together who have the same interests.
- Online activity groups are easy to access using different types of technology, eg smartphone, tablet or laptop.
- Various online platforms are available to use, eg Zoom or Teams.

2. Preparing for an online group

Here are some factors to consider before the first online meeting takes place.

- Does everyone know how to access the meeting?
- Send out a 'How to …' guide which explains how to download apps onto different technological devices.
- Check in with each member before the meeting to see if anyone requires help, eg with joining the meeting.

3. Choosing a theme for the online group

The process for choosing a theme is the same for in-person meetings.

- What are the group's likes and dislikes?
- Was everyone involved in choosing the theme?
- Is everyone happy, and does everyone feel listened to?
- Do all members share a special interest or identity?
- Has a compromise been considered?

4. Tell the group members when the online event is

Let the members know the following information by text, email or on social media:

- the **date** of the event
- the **time** of the event
- the **login details** or **password**, if required.

5. At the beginning of your online group

First introduce yourself as the group facilitator, and then go over the:

- housekeeping rules, eg keep your microphone on mute when someone else is talking, use the chat box function to comment, use the raised hand icon to speak
- the group rules, eg no hate speech, be respectful of each other.

Make sure everyone knows that they have the option to turn their camera off or contribute non-verbally using the chat function.

6. During the online session

The group facilitator will ask if the members feel comfortable introducing themselves. Then:

- introduce the group theme or begin the activity
- give a 15 minute time check before the end of the session
- arrange the **date** and **time** of the next meeting.

Attendance

The facilitator, alongside the other volunteers, should consider who is able to attend the group. Such as:

- an official autism diagnosis is not necessary as long as the person is on the diagnostic pathway or self-identifies as autistic
- is there a catchment area for members?
- the size of the group
- the compatibility of individuals, eg whether members share the same interests
- members' support needs
- the age range of members
- can people initially attend with parents/carers?

Group activity sign-in sheet

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First name	Last name	Time in	Time out	Date: Email

*If you do not wish your email address to be stored, please inform the group facilitator.

NB: Please inform the group facilitator if you would like to be removed from the group email list informing you of future events or activities.

Establishing shared expectations

The facilitator, along with the group members, should establish:

- a joint code of conduct of what is acceptable behaviour within the group, for example, respecting the personal boundaries of other members by not asking probing personal questions (see an example of a code of conduct in the resources section)
- the group's aims and objectives
- a group sign-in sheet with the members' contact details, with the option to be removed from the group membership
- an initial review period to check whether everyone in the group is happy with the way the group is being run
- an ongoing review process to deal with changes in the needs of the group or individual members
- the responsibility of group members with regards to:
    - contributing to the group
    - commitment to the group
- a process for communicating issues to individuals
- a process for communicating a member's removal from the group if their behaviour is deemed inappropriate based on the group's agreed code of conduct.

For the instructional video *"How to manage meltdowns at a peer support group"*, please click or scan **here**:

Preventing and dealing with autistic meltdowns

An autistic meltdown is an intense response to an overwhelming situation. It happens when someone becomes completely overwhelmed by their situation and temporarily loses control of their behaviour.

1. Preventing a meltdown

When choosing a venue:

- Identify a quiet space or separate area to withdraw to, away from the main group.
- Choose a low arousal environment, eg no bright lights.
- Ask the venue if therapy dogs are allowed.
- Build relaxation time into the group session, eg puzzles or games.

2. Minimise the causes and identify the triggers

Every autistic person is different, but some common triggers are:

- sensory difference, eg for someone who is over-sensitive to touch and sound, people brushing past them and loud music could cause pain and sensory overload
- changes in routine, eg if the bus was late arriving
- communication difficulties, eg difficulties understanding and expressing their emotions.

3. Managing anxiety

Tools and strategies can help manage feelings of anxiety to prevent a meltdown from occurring. Ask beforehand what strategies work for each member, eg:

- distraction or diversion
- putting on headphones with a calming playlist
- a stress ball in their pocket.

4. Anticipating a meltdown

Many autistic people will show signs of distress before having a meltdown, which is sometimes referred to as the "rumble stage". They may show signs of anxiety through:

- pacing
- seeking reassurance through repetitive questioning
- physical actions, such as rocking or becoming very still.

At this stage, there may still be a chance to prevent a meltdown. Ask the person if they would like to go to the quiet area and use their calming strategies.

5. What to do if a meltdown occurs

If someone is having a meltdown, they may or may not respond to you.

- Give them time - it can take a while to recover from information or sensory overload.
- Apply any known calming strategies.
- Ask if they would like to go to the quiet space to keep themselves and the other members safe.
- Ask the other members to move, not to stare, turn off loud music and turn down bright lights – whatever you can think of to reduce the information overload.
- Stay calm.

Autistic adult social groups: Guidelines

Conduct

1   I will respect the boundaries of members of the group by not asking probing or inappropriate personal questions.

2   I will respect and understand that other members of the group may have different interests, opinions and support needs to me, and that everyone has the right to express their opinions freely.

3   Any opinions expressed should respect the following guidelines:

- no verbal aggression to other group members, the public or facilitators/volunteers.

- no rude, personal or prejudicial comments (eg sexism, homophobia, racism, antisemitism, religious intolerance, transphobia hate speech, obscenities or pornography) etc to other group members or facilitators/volunteers.

- no rude, inappropriate or offensive emojis/symbols – if in doubt, do not post it. What may not seem disrespectful to you may cause offence to others.

4   I accept that if my conduct as a social group member towards other members is not deemed appropriate, I will be removed from the group.

5   Adult social groups provide a social outlet; the group leader or the other members may not be able to give me advice/support regarding any issues occurring outside of the social groups. However, they can endeavour to direct me to appropriate services.

6   Please dress in an appropriate manner when attending the adult social groups.

Membership profiles

Each group member should have a membership profile. The membership profile should include:

- preferred name and pronouns
- preferred method of communication
- likes and dislikes, details on sensory issues or triggers, details of calming strategies if feeling upset or overwhelmed, an opportunity to read and agree to the group's code of conduct.

The facilitator should be aware that personal details should be retained only in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act.

New member profile

Name (preferred/chosen name):

My pronouns are (please select):

    she/her   he/him   they/them   other:

Would you like a companion/carer to attend with you?   yes   no

Name of carer:

My preferred method of communication is:

    speech   writing   text   other:

Three things that are great about me:

When I am feeling overwhelmed/upset, please:

Please use this space to list anything else you would like us to know. This could include:

- your sensory difficulties
- things that might 'trigger' you (particular subjects, sounds, sights etc.)
- signs or signals which indicate that you are getting overwhelmed/upset
- any fun facts about you.

I am over 18 years old

I have read the group code of conduct

GDPR checklist for autistic adult peer support groups

Tips for keeping and using personal data

First of all, what is 'personal data'?

- Personal data is information about someone that can be used to identify them.

- Under GDPR, personal data is split into two categories:

    1) **personal information**, which could be gathered from another source. For example, name, address, phone number, etc.

    2) **sensitive information**, which would have to have been given by the person themselves. For example, gender, sex, religious belief, medical history, etc.

When you are using or storing personal data, <u>always</u>:

- **Dispose of printed personal data or confidential information securely**, such as by shredding it.

- **Find somewhere you cannot be overheard** to hold meetings or telephone calls if you need to talk about personal data or confidential information.

- **Check whether people around you can see your computer screen.** Can they see any personal data that they shouldn't?

- **Restrict other people's access to personal data.** Lock your computer screen and don't leave personal data or confidential information lying around on a desk or anywhere else insecure.

- **Keep your passwords private.** Never write them down or share them with anyone outside of your group.

- **Make sure that you know who you are sharing personal information with.** Check that you are not selecting 'reply all' if you do not need to; check email threads for personal data or confidential information before forwarding on to anyone; and clearly label post that is 'private and confidential'.

- **Ask yourself, "Do they really need all this information?"** when forwarding emails with personal data or confidential information, including any attachments.

- **Use strong passwords** for all of the systems you use for work, and don't use the same password twice.

- **Use password protection** when emailing attachments that contain personal data or sensitive information.

- **Challenge group volunteers** if you have been sent personal information and you are not sure why. You should never have access to personal data without an explicit purpose. If this happens, ask why the personal data has been given to you. If there is not a valid reason, let them know that you think there has been a data breach and report it.

And <u>never</u>:

- **use an email distribution list to circulate personal data or sensitive information**, unless every person on the list needs the information.

- **share other people's personal data online.**

Finally, <u>an easy rule to follow</u> is:

- Handle all personal data as if it is your own – don't leave it where others might be able to see it.

Evaluation

It is useful to evaluate the success of the group in some or all of the following areas:

- numbers of people attending
- repeat attendance
- skills development
- skills acquired
- self-evaluation questionnaires
- verbal feedback
- enjoyment and atmosphere

Evaluating the success of your adult peer support group

You may be asked to evaluate the success of the group in order to secure future funding. Here are some suggestions that you may wish to consider.

1. Monitor the numbers attending the group

- Keep a log of the numbers of members attending the group.
- Is it the same people attending the group each time?
- Have you asked for feedback from people who are no longer attending the group?

2. Has the group developed or gained any new skills?

This will depend on the nature of the group, but also consider whether members have experienced:
- an increase in social opportunities and activities
- improved social confidence
- a wider range of social experiences.

3. Getting feedback from the group to evaluate enjoyment and atmosphere

Ask the members if they would be happy to:
- complete self-evaluation questionnaires
- provide verbal feedback
- be in photographs.

Conclusion

These guidelines do not set out to provide 'rules of operation', but rather to alert facilitators and groups to some of the issues to consider when setting up a group. Autistic people need and want the opportunity to meet others in safe social situations where their challenges are recognised and understood.
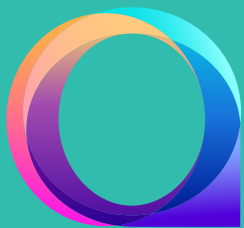
For more information and resources from the Toolkit, please visit our **website**:

If you have any questions about our toolkit or would like advice and guidance on peer support, you can contact us at **peersupportwales@nas.org.uk**.

Disclaimer

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